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ABSTRACT

This paper provides an overview of Houghton Mifflin's Soar to Success, a commercially published intervention program designed to accelerate reading growth for students reading below grade level in grade 3 and above. Soar to Success uses fast-paced, structured lessons focusing on comprehension and decoding strategies, is intended for use with small groups led by teachers, and is ideal for in-class, pull-out, or extended-day programs. The program's main features include: (1) small groups of no more than 7 students meeting for 40 minutes a day, 5 days a week; (2) highly structured instructional plans that combine reciprocal teaching, graphic organizers and authentic literature that emphasize reading for meaning and that use a carefully sequenced series of texts to ensure student success; (3) progress assessments via an ongoing series of "retellings" and oral reading checks to regularly determine students' progress; and (4) activities to be completed at home. So far, the program's evidence of effectiveness is limited to a single study, which shows impressive results with a variety of populations in a relatively short time. Soar to Success, as of the year 2000, was being used in approximately 3,700 school districts around the United States. Sections of the paper discuss background, philosophy and goals, program components, evidence of effectiveness, professional development and support, implementation, costs, considerations, contact information, and policy issues and questions. (SR)

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Soar to Success

Background - Philosophy and Goals - Program Components - Evidence of Effectiveness
Professional Development and Support - Implementation - Costs - Considerations
Policy Issues and Questions - Resources

Topic or Category: Reading
Grade Level: 3-6 (Grades 7-8 to be added in spring 2000
Target Population: At-Risk

OVERVIEW

Background and Scope:

Houghton Mifflin's Soar to Success is a commercially published intervention program designed to accelerate reading growth for students reading below grade level in grade 3 and above. The program delivers specialized instruction to struggling readers and helps them reach or even surpass their grade level in reading ability.

Based on extensive research of the most effective reading strategies, Soar to Success is currently being used in approximately 3,700 schools and districts around the country. Specific program components were developed and refined during an extensive national study (Project Success) conducted from 1995-97. The program has been available to schools since 1998.

Philosophy and Goals:

The primary goals of Soar to Success are to raise students' reading ability to grade level or above as quickly as possible and to help them apply reading strategies across the curriculum.

Program Components:

Soar to Success uses fast-paced, structured lessons focusing on comprehension and decoding strategies that transfer to all reading the student does. The program is intended for use with small groups and is ideal for in-class, pull-out or extended-day programs. Soar to Success includes regular home involvement and built-in assessments to monitor student progress.

Main Features:
Small Group Intervention: Small groups of no more than seven students meet for special instruction for 40 minutes a day, five days a week. Classroom teachers generally facilitate the small-group interventions.
Instructional Plan: The highly structured instructional plan combines reciprocal teaching, graphic organizers and authentic literature to help raise students' reading levels. Instruction in Soar to Success emphasizes reading for meaning and uses a carefully sequenced series of texts to ensure student success and to accelerate student progress.
Progress Assessments: Soar to Success uses an ongoing system of "retellings" and oral reading checks so teachers can regularly determine students' reading progress.
Home Activities: The program includes activities to be completed at home to extend student opportunities for reading and to strengthen the home-school partnership.

Evidence of Effectiveness:

Summary of Evidence: The basis for Soar to Success was an extensive two-year national research

study, Project Success, sponsored by Houghton Mifflin and carried out in classrooms in 13 locations throughout the United States. The model demonstrated effectiveness in accelerating the reading levels of below-level readers in a small amount of instructional time.

Discussion of Evidence:

1. A 1997 study (Cooper) used Project Success -- the prototype for the Soar to Success model -- with 219 students in 4th grade. Another 190 4th graders made up the control group. The samples for the research groups and control groups were selected randomly from 4th-grade students identified by teachers as reading considerably below grade level. The students attended 24 different schools in 13 sites ranging from major metropolitan areas to rural areas. Two instruments were selected to use as pre- and post-tests in this study: the Qualitative Reading Inventory-II (Leslie & Caldwell, 1995) and the Gates-MacGinitie Reading Tests (MacGinitie & MacGinitie, 1989).
Findings included:
Students in the research group performed significantly better than control-group students on retelling, answering questions and comprehension after an average of 76 days of instruction. Measures of the vocabulary subtest did not show significant differences.
The research group students also performed significantly better in oral reading after the same amount of instructional time.
There was no overall statistically significant differences in results obtained with a pull-out or in-class location for the instruction.
A greater proportion of Project Success students were reading at grade level after intervention instruction than were control-group students after a corresponding length of time. For example, at one site (Site 7), 67% of Project Success students were up to grade level at the conclusion of the treatment, compared to 25% of the control-group students; at another (Site 11), 44% of Project Success students and 24% of control-group students were at grade level; and at a third site (Site 8), 75% of Project Success students and 20% of control-group students were reading at grade level.

2. Several other schools not included in the original study issued evaluation results for the 1997-98 school year.
In Springfield, Missouri, 673 students received Project Success instruction. These students in grades 3-8 were enrolled in Title I schools and received intervention instruction for 88 days. An evaluation which used the Burns and Roe Informal Reading Inventory indicated that students in the Project Success groups made a mean gain of 2.2 grade levels.
In Newport News, Virginia, 32 students enrolled in grades 4 and 5 in Title I schools received Project Success instruction for nine weeks. All of the students were a minimum of one year behind in reading development, and some were two to three years behind. The Degrees of Reading Power (DRP) test was administered. Results indicated that 4th-grade students gained an average of 1.4 grade levels, while 5th-grade students gained an average of 2.8 grade levels.
In Amarillo, Texas, 86 students in grades 3-5 received Project Success instruction. The Qualitative Reading Inventory II was used to determine reading gains. Of 34 3rd-grade students tested, the average growth for retelling was 1.9 grade levels; question comprehension, 2.4 grade levels; and oral reading, 1.9 grade levels. Of 27 4th-grade students tested, the average growth for retelling was one grade level; question comprehension, 0.8 grade level; and oral reading, two grade levels. Of 25 5th-grade students tested, the average growth for retelling was 1.9 grade levels; question comprehension, 3.0 grade levels; and oral reading,1.5 grade levels. Students also showed significant gains on the Texas standardized test.
In Cedar Rapids, Iowa, 30 students enrolled in Title I schools received Project Success instruction for 16 weeks. On the Gates MacGinitie standardized test, 4th graders improved 0.8 grade level, and 5th graders improved 0.6 grade level on a composite score of vocabulary and comprehension.

Additional reports of school and district evaluations are are available from the developer.

Professional Development and Support:

Houghton Mifflin Company offers Intermediate Intervention Institutes at various sites around a state, as well as onsite institutes in cooperation with local districts. The institutes provide two days of intensive teacher training in the use of the Soar to Success instructional plan. Participants receive a teacher's manual, which provides background, instruction and lessons for teaching Soar to Success, as well as a

staff development video and other materials. Teachers who use Soar to Success are not required to attend an Intermediate Invention Institute, but participation is highly recommended by the developer.

Houghton Mifflin also maintains full-time education consultants who are available to provide inservice training and support for teachers using Soar to Success. Professional inservice training provided by Houghton Mifflin consists of half-day sessions that include an introduction to the materials as well as instruction on implementing program teaching strategies and using instructional materials. Teachers who have gone through the first level of training and have used Soar to Success for a year can go through a Level II training that will allow them to instruct other district teachers in using the model.

Implementation:

Soar to Success is implemented by teachers. Implementation components include the following:
Learning upper-grade intervention lessons
Implementing the reciprocal teaching model in classrooms
Using graphic organizers to support reading comprehension
Providing ongoing assessment during lessons
Selecting books for below-level readers
Determining when students need to enter and exit the intervention program
Coaching other teachers.

The developer has found that the best implementation results in places where teachers do the following:
Believe that all students can learn to read on grade level
Are willing to use the highly structured model components as directed
Adhere to the timeframes set by the model.

Costs:

The cost of Soar to Success is $795 per kit. Each kit can be used with six students at a time for 40 minutes of instruction and then used with another group of six students. The only consumable item that would need to be purchased for use with additional students and in subsequent years would be the Student Guides at $5.40 each.

The two-day Intermediate Intervention Institute is $750 per person. This price includes all workshop materials and covers the cost of trainer fees and transportation.

Considerations:

While the components of Soar to Success are based on well-researched instructional strategies, the program's evidence of effectiveness so far is limited to a single study. This study (Project Success) is based on sound research and shows impressive results with a variety of populations in a relatively short period of time. Because the program is so new, however, there are no longitudinal data to show whether reading gains are sustained over time.

Another consideration is that the program does not lend itself easily to schools wanting to incorporate volunteers into their reading efforts. Soar to Success is based on the use of small intervention groups, and the developer recommends that teachers facilitate these groups.

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Policy Issues and Questions:
How can states help districts and schools choose the most appropriate reading programs to improve students' skills and performance? What information and assistance would be useful?
Should states promote particular reading programs for districts and schools to use?
How can a reading program's track record be checked and validated?
What criteria should states and districts use to invest in various reading programs initially and for the long term?
How should policymakers weigh the benefits of a reading program versus its cost and required resources?
Can a balance be struck between effectiveness and efficiency?
What state policies can help improve teacher training and professional development so teachers are better equipped to help all students read successfully?

Resources:
Carter, C. (1997). "Why Reciprocal Teaching?" *Educational Leadership*, 54(6), 64-68.

Cooper, J.D.; Boschken, I.; McWilliams J.; and Pistochini, L. (1997). *Project Success: A Study of the Effectiveness of an Intervention Program Designed To Accelerate Reading for Struggling Readers in the Upper Grades.* Unpublished.

Hiebert, E.H., and Taylor, B.M. (eds.) (1994). *Getting Reading Right from the Start: Effective Early Literacy Interventions.* Boston, MA: Allyn and Bacon.

Pikulski, J.J. (1994). "Preventing Reading Failure: A Review of Five Effective Programs." *The Reading Teacher*, 48(1), 30-39.

Rosenshine, B., and Meister, C. (1994). "Reciprocal Teaching: A Review of the Research." *Review of Educational Research*, 64(4), 479-530.

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